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A. M. ROBERTSON
1902

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Whitaker & Ray

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TURQUOISE AND IRON

The innocently azure skies allure,
Like turquoise hopes above an iron world.
In happy passion or in mood obscure,
The innocently azure skies allure.
But, oh, when toiling toward a vision pure,
The beaten body to the earth is hurled,
The innocently azure skies allure,
Like turquoise hopes above an iron world.

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THE WINGED HEART

THE WINGED HEART

Hail, thou, my far-flying heart,
That, with rapid wings apart,
Upward, without cause or care,
Beatest the last possible desires of everlasting air.
Hail, thou, wildly winging heart,
Wheresoever, 'midst the stars or wet by falling clouds, thou art.
Downward to my vacant breast,
Come, and know me for thy nest.
Folded be thy wings and dreams, and long be thy unruffled rest.

Softly fare thou, bleeding ace;
Turn, O, turn the somber lace
Of thy wings, thine aching wings,
From the hues and heights of Heaven and from Heaven's cloudy springs.
Slant away from that blue space,
And the complicated highway to the leaden earth retrace.
Many a heart of mickle worth,
Through the firmamental girth
Pierces, breaks a wing 'gainst Heaven's gate and flutters back to earth.

It was when the tinctured rose
'Gan unfurl its folios
And the earth was pinkly laden,
Was enamored and enameled with the petals, that a maiden
Stepped aworld and did compose
Weird laments and fancy lyrics of the grief that overflows.
She has worn the golden crown;
She has pulled the dim veil down;
She has taken sighs from other hearts and wove them in her gown.

How essential were her ways!
How devout, how true her gaze—
She whom bygones now devour,
She who smiled when sad and did relinquish every pleasant hour
With her lips glad in their praise
And her white hand slipping slowly, sadly out of yesterday's.
Over her, O heart-bruised heart,
With thy oozing wounds apart,
Spread thy crumpled, humbled wings and tell the white face what thou art.

She has sailed from earthly piers—
She, the maid of shrewdest fears,
She, the frailest, palest virgin,
She, of all, the maiden only that was thy delightful surgeon,
Healing all thy wounds and sears;
Pain departed then as now the consolation disappears.
Maiden, mountain, storm and star
Death unmakes, but cannot mar
My heart's memory of this maid resplendent as a silver bar.

Kisses were our marriage feast;
Love, our witness; God, our priest.
By the fervid exultation
Of our answers understood we the divine interrogation.
Ah, the pain of love released!
She, for yielding woman's bounty, took my kisses and deceased.
Nuptials thus by Heaven indorsed;
By decree of Heaven divorced,
She is Heaven-cursed, they say, and flown remote, alone, remorsed.

And the naked babe unled
Up the stair of Heaven can tread.
But upon that sacred way
Would the mourning mother falter? Would she mount or drop astray?
Could she touch that gateway dread?
Pleading to the awful Judge, "God, I have suffered; I have bled."
Could she, having trod the way?
Could she even find the way—
From those weighty shadows rise and lift her heart along the way?

Vile heart, seek her out below,
Where, in some bleak portico,
Wails she and the darkness clips,
Beauteous as when in lifetime all the sun shone on her lips.
Pierce down to the blackest flow—
To the curling of the fogs of inextinguishable woe.
Thou wilt find her own heart riven
And with iron sorrows driven—
Iron nails of iron sorrow by my hand to her heart given.

Thou wilt know her by the grieving
Of her martyred eyes retrieving
All the petals of her sorrows;
Yearning over yesterdays and mourning mutely o'er tomorrows.
And a smile her face receiving
Will be sunken in those sorrows that are in her bosom heaving,
Like a sunbeam on the ocean,
Pleasing it with gilded motion,
While the shadow-jungles under are as black as Hell's devotion.

Like a battle long ago,
Pale blue shadows on the snow
Stagger, and the dim brigade
Soon are blackened shadows only on the snows of azure laid.
Many deaths the shadows know,
Rung out by the bells of churches and by sorrow sobs below.
Bells, shake out your iron flowers,
Rubbing, chiming from the towers.
Let your black, melodious blossoms float about these dismal bowers.

No, heart, start not for below.
O heart, up to Heaven go.
As the sacred zephyrs go,
Take thy course and thy attainment; start not for the gloom below.
Through the turquoise Heaven go.
Follow not with rushing dim winds to the buried caves below.
Sigh with sigh and woe by woe,
With thy pale companion go.
Mingle with seraphic music, not with rumblings from below.

With each airy Alp accrued,
Summit of thy strength renewed;
Fearing that thy flight is ending,
In the ashen, fading distance, still assailing, still ascending,
Now the feeble winds elude.
Glory in the joy of thy accumulated altitude.
Fadeless are those holy sights;
Shining are the angel flights;
Gleaming are the pearly cupolas and castellated heights.

O'er that crystal palisade,
Now thy lighted wings persuade;
Touch the flashes of the domes
Of that grand and gilded city flashing with angelic homes.
Look for her once was a maid:
Gaze at every blue-eyed face among the silver wings arrayed.
Balanced be thy hearty beam
As, beyond that realm supreme,
Thou declinest, for its frescoes are the tarnish of a dream.

Yet, like falcon, ere he swoops,
Mount above the shining groups,
And thy valiant blood reveal—
Plunge as if thy weight were oaken and thy wings were strips of steel.
Where the western heaven droops,
Dive diagonally hellward, past the sailing of the sloops,
Past the shadow winds unfurled,
Where the faulty souls are hurled,
To the basal everglades beneath the casters of the world.

Outside, on the frozen sod,
Falls the snow, where she once trod.
Inside, gazing o'er the sea,
Sit I, and the freezing snowflakes pelt my frozen memory,
And I think it oddly odd
That where she and I delighted, I without her still should plod.
And these frozen pains are more
Than my spirit ever bore;
Still the lapping, lapping waters are forever on the shore.

Still the living, living soul
Pines within its human hole.
And, without the boldened knife,
Sits that hideous, tortured thing, that tortured cripple, human life.
'T is a serpent's fangy jole,
And the foldings of its tail still in the cursed future roll.
And here seek I to explain
Why my haunted crisscross brain
In this manor should be dwelling while my heart flies in the rain.

Why postpone the deathly end,
That must come? Or why offend
That sweet maid for vile tomorrows?
Why sit 'midst this doleful, dirgeful consultation of my sorrows?
Why not with immortals blend,
Challenge Heaven with the deed and on the wings of death extend—
To that black and purple reef
Where repineth my heart's chief,
Where her violet apparel is the vapor of her grief.

Heart, thou weary-winged wight,
Regulate thy wreathy flight,
Where the lowest spirits crawl—
Crouch and crawl the humblest shadows, in their creepholes by the wall.
Draw thy dingy wings tonight
Over every cave and distance in the tenor of thy might.
And, within a saintly glow,
Where the ranting horrors go,
In a mist of palest purple find the partner of my woe.

Where the falling stars recover
Breath, like any fallen lover,
Where the hellish doors are slammed—
There, along the dismal bottoms, drag the anchors of the damned.
But, there also angels hover;
As in Heaven once they shone, shine about her and above her.
You will know her by the care
Of these angels in the air.
They have come to her all holy, and her exile they will share.

Soft, I hear the angels speaking;
Fires the blackened sky are streaking;
There 's a death-wreath on my floor.
Death is with his reckless knuckles rattling on my lockless door.
Ghosts their ghastly mates are seeking.
Frantic with their messages, are wires from Heaven windily shrieking.
Death is dunning me and knows
What a mortal always owes.
I submit my soul to glory and my castle to the snows.

Heart, ere yet the morning ray
Shouts another hateful day,
Take me on my last career.
For your coming I am waiting but not hesitating here.
Soon your winging ends for aye;
Lift, heart, lift, ah lift thy lagging plumes and show thy breast the way.
To that sunless haunted shore
Once again your strength implore;
Think of her there and, as fast as I can follow, fly before.

THE STATUE

THE STATUE

I. Dissatisfaction

Hacked into human shape, the shapely stone
Was now a woman, rigid, cold and bright.
    In loveliness alone,
    There lived my blows in white;
There stood the noble work to beauty worn
By the black chisel out of iron born;
Stood there, ah, stood there once, in marble grace,
Until, with eyes to grand perfection sworn,
I found a vague defect upon the face.
    And scarcely was the foam
Of inspiration dry upon my lips,
    Began my hands to roam
    On more ecstatic trips
About that quarried woman, who should seem,
    When all should have been done,
    The thought with which she was begun,—
Immortal product of a mortal's dream,

To be admired
By men inspired,
By men of art required,
By men of Heaven hired
To teach the soul to speak.
Then lifted I my human hands, to soothe
Or save or seek
A more fanatic beauty on the cheek
Of her so smooth—
An indefinable ideal define,
And make her seem divine.

II. The Greater Effort

At once the bruising workmanship renewing,
Here I a turning took, a slow curve bended.
With vim, the marble-meated virgin hewing,
Full wistfully I blended—
Proudly did glorify—
What was a smile with what (if stone could breathe)
Would have been thought a sigh.
High did my steamy inspiration seethe
And low fell I:
A rap, a scrape, a spark, a flint—O, curses!

That iron should be sharp and beauty soft!
My heart squeezed gloomily; my hopes, in hearses,
Were dragged, oh, not aloft.

III. Destruction

That lily-limbed embodiment of balms,
How it arose of rock, so slow in making,
Implored with fury, solemnized with psalms,
And yet so fast in breaking!
Once more I malleted the stone to form
Without a flaw;
But smaller now within a whitened storm
Of chips, that image took the chisel's law.
And then awhile subliming its perfection,
I fractured it again.
Again I wrought the image's correction,
And cracked it then.
Another smaller effigy then froze
Within the flinty snows,
Tottered, survived the torment of my blows,
And lovely was as when
Its larger beauty on my sight arose.

But slighter, shorter, frailer 'neath my knock,
Still beautiful, but still with some new fault,
Appeared that cold, incorrigible rock
My knife could not exalt.
Erelong my sweating fancy found my lips
Bemoaning the remaining stock,
A fund of rubbish, wanton mess of chips
In the infernal gloom:
There was no room
Behind the broken lock.

IV. The Song

Then she who was the pattern of that stone
Came forth and spake
To me whose grisly, greedy sorrow, thrown
Upon the floor, lay there in beauty's sake.
Sweet were her words, and when those words went wrong,
Sweetly her voice consoled me with a song.
Her notes were like the liquid moonlight there
Upon my woe,
Or like a flock of holy doves that bear
Their whiteness to and fro.

Soft as from dell remote
The consolation from her cordial throat! —
The vocal joy of multiple rejoicing,
The voluble delight of rapid voicing.
Up, up the romping scale
The choral notes prevail
In rivers of immaculate libation,
In channels of melodious undulation.
The room and I, with her own voice propelled,
Through earth and air extended;
And like a boat with onward prow unquelled,
Glided when she had ended.

V. Conscience

On, on, on, on, thou spectral touch of song!
That grievous tune prolong;
Prolong thy dull, deluding arms,
That give their opium and white illusions.
No; no; we pause, and thy fallacious charms
Hold me no more within their mock seclusions.

Away! Awake!
No more that wistful, dreamy sing-song shake;
No more of that false-eyed, adulterous art;
No more the poppy, musk and incense warm
From thy exhaling swarm
Of ravishments to lull me and impart
This honeysuckle fragrance to the veins
Entwined about my heart.
O, cease, thou; I would rather bear my pains;
Thy solace is another form of grieving.
A finer anguish dims thy finer strains;
And music is deceiving.
O, come no more with philterous relieving,
For thou, like steamy air on hot-house flowers—
For thou, like amber rains and scented showers—
For thou, like infant in the milky bowers
Of tender mother-breast,
Art rich in something not quite manifest.

O, thou canst warm our love to its confessing;
And thou canst lift the soul that is unblessed;
But canst not give a blessing
That will forever keep the heart at rest,
Untaunted with thy all-too-short caressing.

VI. Regret

And then my patience burst,
As then my blood reversed,
Encountering the fainting brain pell-mell:
I groped as one accursed—
From Heaven flung to Hell and then by Hell
Damned lower still,
For letting sorrow listen to that knell,
That woman's thrill,
When I had battered beauty to the ground
And then, to reconcile the deed so ill,
Had hearkened to a sound.
As if a song could trill divine absolving
And the forgiveness mild
To him, who in a raving art revolving,
Murdered his chisel's child.
Stained with regret, and wild,
My self myself reviled.

And thus bereft,
And suffering in every wayward cleft
Of thought and gloom,
I left the room.

VII. The Cathedral Organ

The huge cathedral was at prayer that night;
The sacred ceiling spoke of Heaven's might.
Rained on with light,
Devoutly down the velvet-padded aisle,
Assailed with terrors vile,
That flapped their flimsy wings in awkward flight
For many a crowded mile,
I strode, and, near the organ, sat contrite.
Another caliber of music shot
Upon my melody-tormented ears,
Appalled me deeply where the song had not
And seemed to shake the tears.
Cohorts of chords from some abysm profound,
The holy air bestrid.
Then as if backward bid,
Terrific tubes of smashing music did
Infest the air with sound.

Shout, shriek, stop and advance and upward, ho;
Rear notes the fore did shove,
And all were souls escaped below
To shout the joy above.
Then suddenly demoralized, they fell
All disarrayed,
With little stops and many a frightened yell,
As if they were afraid.
But all these warrior notes returned with whom
Could in their ranks find room;
All had survived complete annihilations.
Born with a burst a breath before their doom,
Came out with steel and gold, strength, pomp and plume,
And decked with vines of variations.
Music is joy;
A single note is joy, because it lives
On air that one proud living moment gives:
A moment will destroy.

VIII. The Invisible Ideal

Once more away!
No more, with gaudy sound, my soul betray;
No sound shall kiss or kill my sin today.
My obstinate regret
Still does desire to fret.
Music with it provokes a gentle fray
That makes the soul forget.
It tells the soul that sorrow is no debt;
With sound for prayer, the soul forgets to pray.
Thereat, again I found myself at home;
The singer sang no more,
But told me not to let my fancy roam
Beyond the human door.
She told me Heaven has no bluer skies,
No gladder golden floor,
Than I may see with still my earthly eyes,
And might have seen before.
But oh, while we are learning
The meaning of our yearning,
Who has not wept while Heaven did refute
His statue's claim to godly attribute?

Since not with entire godliness
Did God the human visage knock,
Can human hammers, thinking to excess,
    Inscribe upon a rock
Divinity which they do not possess
Within their own diviner God-made stock?

IX. The Kiss

Oh, no,—she said, she who had lately sung—
With fertilizing grief thou art combined,
    And thence thy vision sprung.
With too much world our faces are unkind;
Art is the countenance of a lovely mind.
And thy courageous mind hath wildly hung
To Heaven's ever-swinging chandelier.
But now from it are thy poor fingers wrung,
        And thou art here.
Yet be not vexed nor lonely in thy heart:

Thy soul is not the mutilated stone;
Stronger than it and statelier thou art;
Thy efforts grander than a world of art.
    Thou dost not grieve alone.
With that, she kissed me, and her lips expressed
A thrill of life with love and beauty blessed.
    More queenly than all art
Beseeched by us of incense-bearing heart—
More true than melody from holy throat—
More holy than the organ's aching note—
    Sweeter than musky roses—
More sweet than the dew that on them reposes—
Sweeter by far than the drop that escapes
    Out of a bale of roses—
More sweet than summer shades or pulp of grapes—
Sweet past the sweetness of reward of toil
At evening hour when limbs and cares uncoil—
Sweeter than stillness when sweet airs embay
The zephyrs that from thinking souls take way—
Sweeter and greater than the praise of men—
Greater and sweeter than the grief's uplifting when
The grief is tender, are—come, love, thy lips again.

THE ENCHANTED NIGHT

THE ENCHANTED NIGHT

BRING these things to me:
Opals and tuberoses.
For we cannot flee
From the evil that the villain gem encloses
Nor the life-exhausting odors that the flower composes.

Purple, crimson flowers
Tell of nimble joys
In celestial bowers—
Fields and grand abodes inhabited by boys,
Who, with darling folly, dance among their changing toys.

Flowers falsely painted!
Wanton is their dress;
Lewdly are they tainted.
For, the pretty happiness which they profess
Is a circumstance of glory I do not possess.

Bring me, sitting lonely,
Flowers that like souls
Live by moonlight only,
Lifting moonlit faces out of coffin-holes,
Where the air with hurting knells and ghastly odor tolls.

For tonight I sicken,
Since I am alone;
And my pulses thicken
When I tell my Sorrow you are not my own:
You, my pale and golden queen, are absent from my throne.

Come tonight, for you
May not keep me long.
Years are short and few:
As we vaguely twist them, Fate may tie them wrong.
Or the brow-bound singer, pausing, may forget his song.

When you sit compiling
Memories and tears,
You may ask one smiling
Moment from the snowfall of the deep-laid years,
Or one song request from Time when Time no longer hears.

Come, then, live this year.
In it we shall crush
All that we revere.
While the cheek of Life is not too dry to blush,
Let our blushes warm the summer till our Time says "hush!"

We shall use them all,
All these, rich years hence;
But like opal small,
They will flash, when squeezed with love and vehemence,
To one youthful year, one gem of lifelong recompense.

In this gem of time,
We shall live excess;
And this year sublime,
Like a hand of meek and tender holiness,
Will be laid on other years as one year's long caress.

In the bath of dawn,
Let our loves immerse—
Up and down and drawn
Crosswise each way through the clanging universe—
While the good ones bless and while opposing sinners curse.

Love me sometimes dimly,
As in twilight's peace.
Love me often grimly,
As when Honor frowns or feasting friends decrease.
Love my sorrows too; and love me though my love should cease.

Sometimes Pleasure works
Over ugly metals.
Sometimes comfort lurks
Where but few can find it. So shall we pick nettles
Sometimes, while near by, a disregarded rose unpetals.

Clutch me in your love
When the vulture's aim,
In the airs above,
With its frenzy greater than its feathered frame,
Like a moth, unwittingly attacks the noonday flame.

And forget me not
When the night-birds fly
Through the haunted grot,
When the satin moon is in the sapphire sky,
And the nightingale makes Heaven's waiting harps reply.

With your perfume-sated,
Carnal lips apart—
Sweet, ensanguinated
Lips—what nymphlike rose's deeply bleeding heart
Have you kissed and kept the crimson for a worthier art?

As the spear-and-shielded
Pagan loves his mate,
As love-psalms are wielded
From the trembling throats of maids immaculate,
I would love and give both loves a wealth of equal weight.

Be the weak deer's throat
For my tiger jaws.
In my great arms float
As on high-tide rivers flutter little straws.
Be the fainting culprit in my unrelenting laws.

Be a tuberose pale,
Deathlike but not dead.
Odors chaste exhale—
Odors that, with sweetest poisons, rock the head.
Yes; to me your fragrant neck is like a flower-bed.

O, that odor sending
Out the soul of flowers!
I voluptuous, bending
Over it, remain with sense unfilled for hours;
And that fragile odor my poor frenzy fain devours.

Kneel with me low kneeling
In my robes of prayer.
Hear me in the pealing
Of the sacred bells in the incarnate air.
Love me in the spirit-wounds tormented by Despair.

See me in earth's mud
And the crystal skies.
Love me when my blood
Lavishes itself and chokes the timid sighs
Of my pallid conscience when my pallid conscience dies.

There are things I dream
That I dare not live;
Deeds I would redeem
From these visions. But what can repentance give
To the mind that daily grows to dreams more sensitive.

Sacredly your gleaming
Topaz hair today
Came to me here dreaming,
Lit the ceilings of my dreams and passed away—
Passed that weird illumination of a weird survey.

When the blue-edged cloud
Fades in sky-blue fires,
Summer sings out loud—
When, through open pores, the scarlet rose perspires,
You will find me breathing with the summer's dull
desires.

Bow your head and enter
The invisible doors.
Breathe with me the center
Of the gilded summer. Tread the love-worn floors.
See the golden happiness crushed from its earthy ores.

Dance with tiptoe Pleasures.
Excellently tread
Fairy-chanted measures.
Wake the morning-glory; put the moon to bed.
Spill the yellow powder from the poppy's drowsy head.

O, that we could name
What we cannot see!
O, to put the blame
On some evil, slipping, incompleted key
That unlocks our pleasure at the next to last degree.

Something ever slips
From the well-read story;
Something's damning lips
And its limbs, with frost of human hopes made hoary,
Lie between and let no man lie close enough to glory.

Therefore, dance no more,
Queer-souled queen, nor smile,
Stand where clouds restore
Dignity and shadow down the forest aisle.
Let me think devoutly how my queen should look awhile.

Stand with stubborn eyes.
Droop your lips grown pale.
Let the frowns disguise
Those devoted features, where the splendors fail,
Daring while they feel the rumblings of a tragic tale.

In the darkness, faintly
Bound with gleaming white—
Roses deathly, saintly—
Still you linger, visible and living quite.
Still are there: upon you, pallid wreaths; around you,
night.

But, sweet shade, who are you?
Eyes, I know you not;
Nor do know how far you
Came from danger-dreams or memories forgot—
Came from dreams or life, desire, dead love, regret, or
what.

THE SPLENDID EARTH

THE SPLENDID EARTH

THE gloomy spirit of expiring day
  Walked on the waters to the purple hills;
Deserted Heaven locked its portals gray,
  As twilight flowed through Fancy's water-mills.

Distinctly on the heavy-silver sky,
  An eagle, seemingly forsaken, crawled.
Soft airs implored the echoes to reply,
  And tinkling waves to one another called.

Its love the heart relinquished with a sigh
  Unto the murmurs of the moving bay.
A magic ship, as daylight shades went by,
  Went somewhere too, on linen wings away.

That sigh which love of beauty did impart
  Was like the day's when day, with tiring breath,
And in the arms of twilight and her heart,
  Succumbed alive in ecstasies of death.

But, oh, ye lovers of complexion chaste,
  Ye flashing hearts with idols fair and golden,
Ye arms adoring Art's camellia waist,—
  Your lives are young; but earth is young and olden.

Our planet reeling through the universe
  Carries no more divinity than duty;
But man, through lifetime reeling toward his hearse,
  Sings of himself in terms of passing beauty.

You bid your masters of the song to send
  Their souls into the stars; the light, the chimes,
The bliss, the perfume of the spheres to blend
  Within the rapture of their tipsy rhymes.

The poet lauds the rainbow, when the rains
  Have swilled the pools about his murky feet.
When evil breezes turn our weather-vanes,
  He gives his harp to zephyrs more discreet.

Some lowly prayer his tearful Muse could help;
  Assailed by shrieks in misery begot,
He leaves the shanty and the beggar's whelp
  And sings to angels who require him not.

A lofty bard once tuned his instrument
  Below the scale; was honored for his lays;
But was, when some recalled the fame they lent,
  By them disliked for taking too much praise.

Manned with a sweet-haired Bacchanalian crew,
  The ship of poetry blows gently on
To pleasant isles and mornings hung with dew
  And blissful hopes of dewier morns anon.

Yet sunny flowers, daytimes of delight,
  Virgins and Venuses, desires remote,
Wine, war and music, praises of the night,
  Are not the total throbs of Passion's throat.

Full are her sobs, her melody as deep,
  The aspiration of her song as high,
When some uneasy pauper goes to sleep
  As when a sacred pageant passes by.

As pure the voice, though gloomier the note,
  That sings of them who, wrapped in rotting rags,
Befoul the streets, from shade to shadow float,
  Profusions of bent wretches, hobbling hags.

So thought the twilight pausing on the pier,
  Even unwary how the thought began;
Therewith observed one, who had ventured near,
  In mossy tatters, standing like a man.

He was a man, soothfast, for that his jaw
  Was not the joint of any other kind;
There, too, his eyes, forever groping, saw
  No bottom in the darkness of his mind.

Insipidly, with rancid lips, he browsed
The sweets of evening air. From bed unclean,
Him, some belated sunbeam had aroused
To curse the wanton beauty of the scene.

What meaning have the colors of the rose,
The width of wave and all the shapes of cloud,
Around the groveling of such as those
Who are the poisons in the mixing crowd?

No self-excited poem with a crown
That makes it queenliest of the vanished years,
Can, with soft fingers, loosen Sorrow's gown
Or make the heart of Pity bulge with tears.

The sandalwoods and musks of sentiment,
Grotesque inaccuracies of desire,
Supernal praise of subter-brutish bent,
Can vaunt, but move no angel to admire.

From human misery there winds a strain:
  Like spiral or like spirit it can touch
And feel the finer forms who know its pain,
  Its grief divine, its beauty lacking much.

No lust can, like a sinner uncaressed,
  Sail with the soul upon a fall of tears.
The little thorn that pricked a maiden's breast,
  More than the park of roses pink, endears.

Still on the wharf the rogue perused the waves,
  Shifted his wracking skeleton awry,
And read the rolling headstones of their graves
  Who yet below the half-seen grasses lie.

His lifelong woe gazed on the water's woe,
  And haply thought, should he fall from the shore,
His grief would melt with all the seas that flow,
  Nor make the burden of the ocean more.

He was not sanctified by heavens gray;
For him no mate or friend of hand came home;
His breast ne'er moved with what he could not say
Of marble or medallion out of Rome.

Love could not lure, nor danger make him bold,
Nor music still his hunger with refrains;
No trees of twisted emerald and gold
Could press the stupors in his leaden veins.

The light on heaven or the shaking tree,
Cathedrals dark with ivy of the ages,
The swoons of love, exertions of the sea,
Were not the pictures of his inner pages.

He stares upon the nectars of the bay,
And it becomes thereat a poison-bath;
Leans out and stares and breathes and moves away
And stares but sees no vision in his path.

Not lifelike is he, but is yet alive;
  The laws of God are asking for his death.
With each drawn air his lips and eyes revive;
  His life is but the wagging of his breath.

No hindrance give unto his leaving feet,
  Nor make philosophy upon his trail.
When he is gone the day will be complete
  And baby stars play over twilight pale.

So too may pass the glamour of a song
  That calls for revelry where mourners dwell,
And seem, like that poor mortal thing gone wrong,
  A mildewed statue groping back to Hell.

SHORTER POEMS

YEARS

In wayward forgetfulness only,
  One night when the winds were fast,
I unlocked an old cellar, where, sadly,
  I rummaged the trunks of the past.

I found many things of no value,
  Many things that I should not have kept;
But I found the veil of a woman,
  And found I had heedlessly wept.

Not for those who might question or judge me,
  Nor for any to understand,
Nor for any to read and to love me,
  Nor for any to reprimand,

But for me and the sake of a memory
  Of her for whose heart I once planned,
I trailed the black wine o'er the parchment,
  And wrote in a desolate hand:

We were lost in a sorrow peculiar,
In the streets of a city of woe;
And we walked up the hills to the starlight,
And my heart was a wandering woe.

We strayed by a lighted cathedral,
Whose windows were painted and long.
I loved all the saints on the windows,
But my heart knew a saintlier song.

I was youthful and mad and desirous,
At the perilous age of a boy,
When he feels the first man in his bosom
And his heart is a clangor of joy.

And while all of the bells in his bosom
Are ringing, he does not know
That through all of his heaven the rapture
Is rung by the weight of his woe.

And she was the older and wiser,
  And she looked when she would not say—
Looked low in the heavens with languor
  Of eyes that were shaded and gray.

And we said our conspiracy lowly,
  While all of the stars were in tune,
As they flashed the soft news of our loving
  To the eyes of the curious moon.

I was lost in my heroine's tresses
  Festooned on her forehead with grace;
Yet, leaving the shade of the tresses,
  Was perplexed by the light on her face.

Then a mist lowered sadly around us,
  With the luster of stars in the air,
And settled like stars on her tresses,
  Or clusters of grapes on her hair.

I feared we might come, even slowly,
To the end of our walk too soon
To fill my delight with the beauty
Of her hands that were white as the moon.

We passed by the umbrage of branches,
And over my wishes there stole
The sanctified odor of jasmine
As the jasmine discovered my soul.

The scent of the jasmine went upward
To mix with the magic of June,
And an innocent cloud became drunken
And reeled from the arms of the moon.

Then we stopped, for the moon seemed unconscious,
Like a corpse that was floating in light,
With its necklace of pearls trailing earthward—
Or a lily afloat on the night.

Bewildered, we turned, and she, sighing,
Beheld me with glimmering eyes;
For, though wrapped in the raiment of fashion,
She was human as deep as her sighs.

In a moment, the million stars flickered,
Their places were sooty and still.
A tempestuous current had whirled them
From their places now somber and chill.

That heavenly anarchy frightened
The earth and my tremulous bride.
When I looked for her features, they vanished,
And the night airs remained by my side.

What use to describe the black tragedy
That perhaps was not meant for tears?
The crime of our parting was Nature's;
And the criminal instrument, years.

It may have been death or divergence
That solicits me now for these tears.
Yet it seems that the only disaster
That caused her departure, was years.

THE LIPS OF EVOLUTION

What is that color on your lips revealing
Itself? 'T is red, if I know red. But red
Is only color. What quick fiend was dealing
With your emotions when those tints o' erspread
Your pretty lips like robins coming to be fed?

Why should your blood with all its meaning blush?--
When your wild nature Science has defended
And says that, foot for hoof and tooth for tush,
And your slim waist of bulky flanks amended,
You are, with modern brutes, from ancient things
descended.

And women who are proud within their homes
Can argue more but prove not one cur less
Behind them, of the yelping pack that roams
Through their ancestral shades, while we caress
The lithe and hairless arm half-draped in modern dress.

Of lives long since devoured we chew the cud,
I know. But where have you the beast's remains?
The baggage of what brute is in your blood
And borne along the railway of your veins,
That you should have the blush that to your lip attains?

Is that swift color on your lips a sin?
Or is it kindly put there for my part—
A red light signaling the wrecks within,
Or just a business of the sweets that start
And travel outward from the depot of your heart?

There may be some vile evidence on you
Which Time has not been able to dispel.
But when to your teased lips the tincture flew,
No scientist with playmate lips could tell
We rose from howling beasts or all from angels fell.

FAITH

Forgetful child of all-remembering Death,
Where is the comrade of the little tryst,
Your life? Are you contentedly assured
The soul of you will blush again when you
Are deep in death, that you should make of life
A cemetery of unsocial neighbors?
A silent soul is reaching for your hand;
And you are waiting for his hand to hold
Upon your heart, and nominate him friend;
To do so with no tremor of suspicion
Or cynical reserve. While crabbed Death
Is busy with accounts and scrutinizes
Our lives, that none may linger very long
To his foul credit overdue, oh you,
To whom, by grace of loving accident,
Is given here a snatch of years, half bad
Before enjoyed—how often have you flung
Both arms about your shrine, with sentiment?—
And said: I do believe in this and, with it,
My faith will, cheek to cheek, engage, and here

I shall not shame to weep the wines of love
Crushed from the snowy grapes of all that I
Think best in me.

Who has not vainly wished for things possessed
In him? Who sees no mountains in his soul
Unclimbed by his own limbs? What lips have not
Demanded more than they have given, knowing
Not why? Does any trembling heart know why
Its longing is unfilled? Or make itself
An humble bridge whereon another heart
May venture? Say, if, answering, some heart
Should howl a No from here to the round moon,
Would that long word not be the silver truth?

Each man withholds some measure of his love:
Leaves one branch of the chandelier unlit:
One room within the mansion leaves unfurnished:
The poet does not tell of all he knows:
The singer keeps the sweetest song unsung:
Virtue will not uncover Beauty's bosom:
For all withhold their best. At the cold bottom

Of the heart's deepest well, there lies a drop
Of blood—a lovelier and redder drop
Than ever drawn with buckets of mistrust.
All-conquering faith can get this love's best drop,
And faith is in your own drop of this kind,
That each with each full willing to exchange
And each of each demanding to be given,
And each to each refusing to begin,—
The drop lies cold, and curdles with old age.
We are afraid to love too hard. We fear
Devotion may provoke the other's pride.
Some woman, stern betwixt a coronet
And throne, may take our simple courtesy
With regal eye. Some frail bisque maid
May take our passion's best in coquetry;
Or Selfishness make hay beneath our sun.
So fails the force of love. There is no soul
Whose crystal has no spot of jealousy:
Whose lovelight has no blemish of suspicion.
So, too, no woman loves with lyric passion
The chanting heart unharmonized with doubt.

But were there faith, and faith of such a kind
As Heaven favors and the Fates applaud,
A faith clear as the love it asks, the Owner
Could use it as a starry wand. He could
Enslave the hands wherever he should fancy
To drop upon his knee. For such is faith.

HALF-PAST ELEVEN

Discussing love and friendship, late at night,
We sat beyond the lamp, whose covered light
  Tinged us more tenderly than clearly.
  Her eyes demure on mine shone dearly,
For her emotion made them damp and bright.

As deviously as the bees in flight,
We stole the sweetest thought from every height,
  For we were not in love, but merely
    Discussing love and friendship.

Not many days in Time's ambrosial sight
Our voices had been mixing. Such our plight,
  Though loving not, knew not how nearly
  While sadly, idly, but sincerely
    Discussing love and friendship.

BALLADE OF THE NATURAL HEART

To me it seems a glory to excel
  Where nature placed the honor long ago.
And I prefer the nut with hardest shell.
  The bread I eat I ask be made of dough.
  The purest white is all I ask of snow.
And diamonds I ask in all my rings.
  All honor to the rivers when they flow!
I claim the real, old, rigid rule of things.

When all is duly done, I feel quite well.
  Therefore I like my wagon-wheels to go.
Lines may be straight and not be parallel.
  I want my oars about me when I row.
  Indeed, I yearn to pay the debts I owe.
And I respect the little bee that stings,
  Aspiring not to say "Yes," meaning "No."
I claim the real, old, rigid rule of things.

I wish to say "Ah!" when a rose I smell;
And when I make my finger bleed, scream "Oh!"
For what is pain without the right to yell?
Why have I tears if not to wet my woe?
I like all things to do the best they know,
If but a leech and faithfully it clings.
There 's beauty in the peacock and the crow.
I claim the real, old, rigid rule of things.

ENVOY.

Prince, bring me not bouquets where flowers grow.
On beggars I want rags; crowns on my kings.
I love to see the peasant use his hoe.
I claim the real, old, rigid rule of things.

ONE OF THE WICKED

At a ghastly flame, where the coals were gold,
He tempered his dull-red heart.
With a grisly hold on his heart, he sold
Its blood for his leading part.

He gave his heart for these golden coals,
And he gave without a groan.
He filled up holes with other men's souls
And rammed them down with his own.

He fed the fat of his friends with fat,
And they drank of his foaming wine.
A child he begat, and he buried the brat
When his sins were ready to dine.

But he starved the bones of his men who dug
His wealth from the Poor Man's hand;
While many his thug Death snatched for a plug
For the graves of the Rich Man's land.

The hunger of mothers he took for a jest;
He laughed when the Poor Man cried.
During life he was blessed with a wealth of the best;
But they damned him when he died.

MADELINE

Madeline, maiden of dreams,
  Pale is the face of the moon,
What dost thou think of its beams?
What is that message that seems
  Music of mystical tune?

Phantoms and pearls from its gleams
  Over the garden are strewn—
  Pearls in thy moonlight of June,
                Madeline.

Maiden,—with many weird themes
Moonlight in summer night teems.
  Out of this moonlight are hewn
Bodies of intricate schemes,
  Dreams that thou dreamest too soon,
                Madeline.

THE SUICIDE

She seems a form created for the bards.
  Low is her brow, but high the well-kept hair.
With saintly eyes that know the Devil's cards,
  She gazes in a glass; and, half aware
  Of her reflection, watching dimly there,
She sees her death; but death she disregards.
  Light as a swan, she moves, that even air
The gentle motion of her frame retards.
She opens now a case; consults a dial,
  And satisfies herself it is the time.
Out of a drawer takes a poison-vial,
  Without a sigh or omen of the crime.
For she was one who lit her lamp at noon
And loved the daylight of an evil moon.

METEMPSYCHOSIS

When I was duchess of a rich domain
  And you, a powdered page below my throne—
  When I, a cloud, across the sky was blown,
And you were lover in a garden lane—
When I was queen and you, within my reign,
  Were supplicant with plaint of humble tone—
  When I a willow was, by river grown,
And you, a fish, did in my shade remain,
You sometimes upward looked and you seemed grateful
  To me who stretched the favor o 'er your head.
I saw no glance of anger fierce and hateful
  Upon your brow to civil manner bred.
Now I, a fish, you ply me with a hook
Caught in my mouth, and wrench me from my brook.

THE HEART'S ELECTION

If your heart's government were made by vote,
  And voters were the crowding drops of blood,
Each with a willful franchise to denote
  The ruler of thyself, as fast they scud
  Upon the pulse, how would the blushing flood
The nomination of my suit promote?
  Would they elect my name with every thud
  Of the exulting heart? Or would they float
Sometimes dividedly, with other names—
  Some drops for me and some for my rejection?
Oh, tell me they will rush with loud acclaims
  And make me hero of their red election.
Tell me their vote is, and their animus,
With every beat, for me unanimous.

HER BEAUTY

The substance of her beauty! Can I tell?
Shall I describe a thing without a name?
The most religious words I have would maim
Her elegance, that shone forth to dispel
The airs before, as music from a bell.
Her beauty was the tenure of a frame
Soft as the drooping-tulip; 't was the claim
That earth makes now and then for those who dwell
Beneath the circuit of the sun's reflection,
That they may gaze upon a human psalm
And call the music of its form perfection.
Her beauty was devout; and, though 't was calm.
'T was almost audible; but low. And she
Walked o 'er the earth as in a minor key.

SORROW

Nine webs of straggling rivers wrap our earth
  And, with intent the oceans to dilute,
  Their frayed ends to the oceans contribute.
But their few glossy ripples are the mirth
Of foam-besprent Old Ocean. Nothing worth
  Are their few quarts, and nothing constitute
  Their wholesome pourings, though they prosecute
The rotund ocean from its poles to girth.
So do the streams of joy around me pour,
  Endeavoring my sorrow to abate,
That, like the ocean, is too salt a shore,
  To sweeten with such mild adulterate;
But takes the many rivers for its fare
And still is green and bitter everywhere.

TO A WITTY LADY

You are not beautiful. Unlike the spring,
You come not wrapped in flowers pink and sunny.
Sometimes, alas, on mortgages and money
Your thoughts embrace—and many a bonded thing.
And zounds, great dame! your lofty wit doth wring
The noses of all men and make us funny.
Sometimes your language savors of sweet honey;
Sometimes your honey savors of a sting.
And yet, I 'd ask it all: your rapid-firing eyes,
Your hasty brain, your heart well-timed and slow,
Your lips, where satire sits and fancy lies,
Your hair piled up on many pins below,—
But that I fear your sin your wit provokes
To make my sins pincushions for your jokes.

THE FLEETING DEER

Prithee, why run before me, foolish deer?
Gone on your limbs full strong though seeming frail,
And hoofs with hoofs contending in your fear,
You dash into the distance and thence fail
From weary sight. Amazement, in your trail,
Knows not how far what lately was so near.
Timidly as a virgin takes the veil,
You take the valley in your fright sincere.
I did not mean to frighten you from play,
Nor harm you, zephyr-limbed one. Why abhor
Me? Have you seen me ever? Why away
Before me, whom you ne'er looked on before?
Is 't through your ancestors some hunter's yell
Remembering, you fear all men? Farewell!

THE INTRUDING MEMORY

What! Comest thou again, O memory vile?
'T was thou that shot'st across my troubled thought.
Wherefore again to flit and ban awhile
Along these rooky timbers? No wish brought
Thee here. What art thou in my castle caught?
If ghost, begone; depart thee many a mile.
If healthy thing, be feared to stay for naught.
I let thee weep, but sanction not thy smile.
Listen! and, while my frightened heart I prop,
Depart, and ever from this realm abstain.
Unbreathing substance, from my eyelids drop,
Find thy way out; grope not about my brain.
Begone, with all the agonies that ail thee,
Or, ghastly shape, I banish, I exhale thee.

GUILTLESS

If there were twenty suns upon the sky,
  Yea, more, and millions more; in sooth, were there
  As many suns as stars, all plastered where
The lonesome discus now outstares the eye,
And could our human sight the blaze defy
  And look upon the incandescent air
  As now we see beneath the single glare
Of what we have there shining,—then would I,–
Then would I fling my heart into the light
  And, being there, would say to ye around:
Read ye the crime: declaim the wrong and right,
  Wherever right be seen or wrong be found.
And if the sight a single crime reveals,
Crush ye the heart beneath your vengeful heels.

TO MY INK-WELL

Thou blotty bottle, bottle stained and grim,
  Thou imp, thou gnome, a moody friend art thou.
  And yet thyself I would not trade, I vow,
For golden ink-decanter with a rim
Of pearls and decorations wreathed and slim.
  Now tell me, ugly boy with inky brow,
  Of some unwritten thoughts, which you allow
To dream awhile within your tranquil brim.
How many black imaginings are there
  Waiting to crawl out for my livelihood?
Phantasmas, whims, a poet's morbid ware,
  Capricious thoughts, perhaps misunderstood?—
All liquid yet and blended in their well;
Some will be born; how many, who can tell?

TO A CERTAIN POET

The sow, her snout upheaving from the mire,
  Can smell the approaching breeze. 'T is well! But
    whose
And where 's the fiery nostril can acquire
  Opinion of the future?—if its news
  Ever blows out beforetimes to amuse
Or make a disappointment of desire.
  How fares his fame with famous retinues?
Will it on wings of purple flame aspire?
An illustration of the heaven its fire?
  Or weary sparkle, crawling like a fuse?
How will the minions of the Mint admire
  What does the color of their gold accuse?
  And, each to each's liking, will it use
  Astronomers to stare or bugs peruse?

THE FABLE

They told me it is fable; that it blew
With uncredentialed winds from olden time.
Still seemed it that, with sentiment sublime,
This fiction made the truthful seem untrue.
They said it is a shadow of the few
Left by a fervid sun in fervid clime—
The sun of myth is censured with the crime,
When leaving us, of leaving shadows too.
Long was the night when, to the night's long woe,
This tale came up the back-stairs of my heart.
It would not answer questions, nor would go;
And I would not command it to depart.
I will not with the clever crowds applaud
Who question beauty while they deal in fraud.

TO THEE

Sweetheart, my lips with lyrics do not flow;
  But hark, thou, to the grief-imprisoned song;
Forgive the mute camellia for its woe.

With weighty passions, quick words do not go;
  Great love is like a silence, grim and strong;
Sweetheart, my lips with lyrics do not flow.

About my gloomy head thy light arms throw;
  Bear with the frowns that to my love belong;
Forgive the mute camellia for its woe.

On my heart pattereth my love, like snow,
  That works no sound upon a belfry's gong.
Sweetheart, my lips with lyrics do not flow.

Forgive these lips that when they speak, speak low:
They do not charge the guilty earth with wrong.
Forgive the mute camellia for its woe.

I and that flower smile not to and fro.
Find us not in the jewels of the throng.
Forgive the mute camellia for its woe;
Sweetheart, my lips with lyrics do not flow.

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